

Europe, July to September 2026

August 29, Stornoway (Outer Hebrides, Scotland)

Weather is really getting warm now, into the 60s. Stornoway is one of those places I really wanted to go to, but then again, I'm kind of strange. I like to go to places that are hard to get to. The Outer Hebrides is one such place. It's an archipelago, not too far from the mainland. The primary island is Lewis and Harris, which is one island separated mostly by a river, kind of like Minneapolis and St. Paul. The scenery is more or less flat, non-descript, but great if you like peat. We drove for an hour over land like this to the right to see two attractions.





The first is the Callanish standing stones. They are a group of stones much like Stonehenge, but older. Even older than the pyramids. There are several sets of them around the countryside of western Lewis. We went to see the largest outcropping. It's amazing that, with an attraction so old, people are still able to walk up and touch the stones. Can't get that close to Stonehenge anymore.

People who are familiar with the series "Outlander" might recognize that these are the stones reported, in that series, to be near Inverness. That part is not true, but the rest is questionable. In Outlander, the lead, Claire, touched one of the stones and was immediately transported back to 18th century Scotland, a few years before the Battle of Culloden. So, as a follow up, here is a picture of me touching one of the stones.

I suspect you might now be anticipating a picture of the stone without my presence. Sorry, that was too obvious.



On to the second attraction. Prior to 1950, no one on the island had electricity. Even in 1956, only 80% of the population did. It was not until 1989 that the entire island was electrified.

Before 1950, things got fairly cold on the island. Heating was an issue, especially because there were/are almost no trees, so no source of wood for fires. But they did have a lot of peat, and that was their energy source. Peat was cut in the spring and dried until the fall, when the people finally had enough burnable peat to last the winter.

People in that time lived in “Black Houses”. Not the color, but the name. They were long houses without windows and with two areas. The upper/larger house area was for people. The lower/smaller area was for animals. The middle of the large house had a peat fire that burned 24/7. That part was always filled with smoke, and the peat smell was everywhere. The Scottish call it a “pleasant sweet” smell. Not my description.



We went inside an authentic black house. When we got back to the ship, we had to send our clothes to the laundry. It was impossible to get that “sweet” smell to go away.

With the coming of electricity, people moved from black houses to white houses. Nothing to do with the colour (aka color). A white house was one with electricity and running water. Imagine not having this island-wide even into the 1980s.

One more picture.



And a fast fact. One very significant to Americans. This part of the world was the birthplace of Mary Anne MacLeod, born into a fishing family in the poor area of the island. The proximity of her house was mentioned by the tour guide as we passed the area, even though we never left the main road to see it. Mary's native language was Gaelic. She learned English in school. She grew up to marry an American named Fred and had five children, one of them named Donald Trump.

